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ABSTRACT

More specifically than the general concept of "development," the use of entertainment media as a tool for social intervention implies the purposive utilization of the mass media to engineer specific changes in knowledge, attitudes, or practice. Thus, this type of use of the entertainment media is inseparable from the notion of "what ought to be done" to attain a certain goal. Calls for the development of ethical codes for the electronic media have become more strident given the increased role entertainment television has been playing in the diffusion of information and knowledge. Ethical concerns are equally justifiable when the globalization of prosocial television practices is considered. Pro-social television is an important genre in education-entertainment practices--it merges positive attributes of entertainment with the systematics of education. It is possible to create a more textured ethical framework--one that recognizes the "deontological" (process) and "teleological" (consequence) issues associated with conceptualization, production, distribution, and consequences of entertainment-education materials developed to promote and support change. H. Nariman provides diverse guidelines which raise deontological and teleological issues. Also, borrowing from the more developed field of ethics as it applies to the press is possible. Many of the ethical principles that influence the practice of contemporary journalism are derived from ideas developed during the Age of Enlightenment, a fertile period in the evolution of human thought. Ethics and prosocial television in general continues to be a relatively neglected field of inquiry. (Contains 16 references.) (NKA)

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ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION AND THE ETHICS OF SOCIAL INTERVENTION

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ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION AND THE ETHICS OF SOCIAL INTERVENTION

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Ethics and development are two inextricably interwoven concepts. Development implies a certain vision of the future and decisions about the actions that will help that future come about. Thus, the idea of development connotes "what ought to be done" to get from here to there. And the core concern of ethics is "what ought to be done" regarding human behavior (Carmen, 1994).

Even more specifically than the general concept of "development," the use of entertainment media as a tool for social intervention implies the purposive utilization of the mass media to engineer specific changes in knowledge, attitudes or practice. Thus, this type of use of the entertainment media is inseparable from the notion of "what ought to be done" to attain a certain goal. The goal may be lofty: prevent disease, reduce hunger through increased agricultural productivity, improve quality of life, but it still implies that something *will* be done to effect change; something will be done that will affect people's lives. The ethical question implicit in such a decision must be pondered and answered.

Rather than a fully developed answer to ethical questions about the use of entertainment media for social intervention, this is a progress report. What this "paper-in-progress" does is raise a few questions and address a few issues as we continue our search for at least some answers about the ethical issues that should govern the use of entertainment media in social intervention.

In their seminal paper on the ethical dilemmas of prosocial television, published in 1990, Brown and Singhal stated that "[w]hile the use of prosocial television programs raises several ethical dilemmas ... literature on television ethics is severely limited. Television ethics represents a relatively neglected and undeveloped field of inquiry" (Brown and Singhal, 1990). This is still true today. A search of books, articles and papers on this topic since 1990 reflects an alarming paucity of research.

Brown and Singhal (op. cit.) proposed four important ethical dilemmas of prosocial television:

> (1) the *prosocial content* dilemma, that is, how to distinguish prosocial from antisocial television content;
>
> (2) the *socio-cultural equality* dilemma, that is, how to ensure that prosocial television upholds socio-cultural equality among viewers;
>
> (3) the *unintended effects* dilemma, that is, how to respond to the unintended consequences of prosocial television, and
>
> (4) the *prosocial development* dilemma, that is, how to respond to those who argue it is unethical to use television as a persuasive tool to guide social development.

Brown and Singhal's four dilemmas continue to be questions in search of an answer five years after they were posed. This is especially worrisome because development in general, and entertainment-education in particular, presents decision-makers with a number of what Denis Goulet (1971) labeled *"cruel choices"* (see also Carmen, op. cit.) For example, choices about which problems to attack and which to ignore, at least for the time being; choices about which populations, or population sub-groups, will be given attention and which will not; choices about how to allocate resources and so on.

Goulet has tweaked the consciousness of development practitioners again with his recent book *Development Ethics* (1995). The book does not address the issue of entertainment-education, but many of its principles can easily be adapted. For example, chapter 9, "Technology for Development," asks questions that seem relevant in this regard. These questions include, among others:

> (a) How development processes (or, in our case, the use of entertainment media as tools of social intervention) can create and destroy values through specific conceptions of rationality, efficiency and problem-solving rooted in the Western values that come along with many of the new technologies we use (or the media we use for edutainment purposes or the very conception of entertainment and/or education).
>
> (b) What is the impact of [Western technologies] or [entertainment-education] on key values when they are transferred to Less Developed Countries. Concerns cited by Goulet include neglecting needs, cultural damage, what purposes [technologies] [entertainment-education] serve and whether those purposes include harnessing technology to human needs, and if we have the wisdom to match our sciences.
>
> (c) What is appropriate technology.
>
> (d) What is a "viable" development strategy and whether such a strategy addresses the satisfaction of basic human needs (including material and non-material and starting with those of the neediest in order to reduce inequalities between and within countries); promotes endogenous self-reliance through social participation and control, and encourages harmony with the environment.

In more general terms, the proliferation of the mass media and their increasingly central role in diffusing information and knowledge has raised several ethical concerns. Journalists have been grappling with these concerns with increasing fervor in recent years. Codes of ethics and other permutations of prescriptive ethics have been formulated and implemented. These are proving to be inadequate as practitioners experience conflicts of prescriptions.

There are also increasing calls for the development of ethical codes for the electronic media, especially entertainment television. These calls have become more strident given the increased role entertainment television has been playing in the diffusion of information and knowledge. Efforts at curbing the perceived deleterious effects of entertainment television in the United States trigger mobilizations against censorship and the abrogation of First Amendment Rights. Ethical concerns are equally justifiable when we consider the globalization of prosocial television practices. Pro-social television, is an important genre in entertainment-education/edutainment practices. It appears to be the dominant genre in the entertainment-education/edutainment literature. This practice merges positive attributes of entertainment --attention getting, involvement, memorability-- with the systematics of education --structured curriculum, tested methods, regular evaluation-- to promote and support prosocial ends. In their pioneering article, Brown and Singhal defined prosocial television as a genre of television utilizing content that depicts cognitive, affective, or behavioral activities considered to be

socially desirable by most members of a television audience (Brown and Singhal, 1990, 268). They also identified the need for a more encompassing body of television ethics--one that went beyond television news (journalism) and included consideration of prosocial television.

In the five years since that article, the entertainment-education/edutainment practice has expanded to include a variety of other channels. The practice continues to be evident in folk channels, in most genres of radio and television programming and can now be found in computer games in private homes and in cyberspace. The practice is being applied in an extensive range of social contexts. These include urban, rural and hinterland areas of more developed and developing countries. Heidi Nariman has concluded that the entertainment-education soap opera methodology can be implemented by any television system irrespective of the nature of its political, technical and economic environment. A review of current global practices shows that diffusion of the edutainment method is being facilitated by an influential group of government supported institutions, such as Johns Hopkins University's Population Communication Services (PCS), The Academy for Educational Development's (AED) AIDSCOM program, the World Bank, and USAID. Windahl would define these practitioners as emblematic of the external initiative solution model (Windahl, 1992, 41). The dynamics of this global diffusion require the development of a more inclusive ethical framework to inform the conceptualization, development, distribution, and evaluation of entertainment-education materials.

Two recent developments in the field of communication for social change makes this task a little easier. Windahl & Signitzer's (1992) synthesis of the field of communication planning provides a valuable compass to navigate the potentially empowering practice of communication for social change. In *Using Communication Theory*, Windahl and his associates reinforced the importance of: (a) involving potential beneficiaries in defining the problem to be addressed; (b) pretesting communication materials among the target audience; (c) constant monitoring, and (d) systematic evaluation of effectiveness in the development of effective communication for social change. That synthesis promotes participatory practices, marginalizes top down approaches and makes a clear distinction between process and consequences.

The second development has been the publication of Heidi Noel Nariman's (1993) *Soap Operas for Social Change: Toward a Methodology for Entertainment Education Television*. Nariman's work is the most systematic examination of the theory and practice that supports the conceptualization, production and delivery of effective prosocial entertainment products. The twenty-one guidelines she offers can be considered as equally valid for the conceptualization, development, and distribution of other effective prosocial entertainment products. The guidelines are clustered around *issues of process and consequence* (Nariman, 1993, 111-125).

It is therefore possible to combine Windahl's and Nariman's works to create a more textured ethical framework--one that recognizes the *deontological* (process) and *teleological* (consequence) issues associated with conceptualization, production, distribution, and consequences of entertainment-education materials developed to promote and support change.

Deontological (Process) and Teleological (Consequence) Ethics and Entertainment Education

Deontological ethics is concerned with *identifying and following good rules*. It is fair to say that over the past three decades a body of good rules (based on theory and practice) has emerged to guide the practice of communication for social change. As stated earlier, these rules promote participatory practices, marginalize top-down approaches and are committed to what Rogers describes as bringing about both social and material advancement. (Rogers, 1976, cited in Brown and Singhal). Windahl and associates have provided a valuable synthesis of these good rules.

Teleological ethics is concerned with the *consequences or results of actions*. Associated with this perspective are the challenges of reconciling the sometimes contradictory demands of anticipating the probable consequences of an action and its desirability, and ensuring that the action will benefit more people than it will damage. Ultimately, teleological ethics is motivated by the expectation that all social change interventions ought to have a good effect on society (Vivian, 1991).

Nariman's guidelines raise 21 deontological and teleological issues. We will present them next, focusing mainly on the first eight, which are more action oriented, and synthesizing the remaining thirteen which deal basically with desired outcomes.

Nariman's first two guidelines conclude that *the entertainment-education soap opera methodology is transferable and usable globally*. From a process perspective, there are issues of motivation. Who decides when to use the entertainment-education strategy? Is the decision made within the consuming society or is it strongly recommended by an international donor -- part of a package? It is clear that the decision to introduce an entertainment-education strategy must not be imposed from without. Failure to require participation can encourage the teleological issue of stifling alternate communication strategies. In fact, it can be argued that influential U.S. practitioners and organizations have over-privileged the soap opera to the detriment of other genres.

Nariman's third guideline states that the *entertainment-education strategy is adaptable* for use in the entertainment media that are popular with the target audience for the social message. The strategy is most effective when applied in a *repetitious* form of entertainment.

Regarding that guideline, social change practitioners must be reminded of Tim O'Sullivan's observation that entertainment has been one of the most successful rhetorical ploys of the twentieth century. The idea of entertainment is trotted out to justify representations that can on other grounds be criticized for racism, sexism, metropolitanism and the rest. In short, he concludes, "don't be beguiled by claims that something offensive is only entertainment" (Tim O'Sullivan, 1994, 105-106). This potential is minimized with the participation of the potential consumer in the conceptualization and design stages. The recent literature from agencies such as Johns Hopkins (PCS) and AED's AIDSCOM suggests that the requirement of participation in constructing entertainment-education materials has been internalized. That message needs to be amplified.

Nariman's fourth guideline states that "the entertainment-education methodology can be used to *address a variety of development themes*." We believe, however, that that conclusion must be nuanced by the need to examine the site of communication for social change practice. Because of the dependency relationship that often exists between producers and funders of entertainment-education products, there are constraints on what themes are addressed or not addressed in these products. Evidence from Jamaica and Guyana indicates that producers either practice self censorship or are subject to direct censorship in the process (Cambridge, 1992). Social change communicators, especially those who facilitate the practice, must be aware of these realities and not establish unrealistic content expectations. Participation and pretesting are valuable strategies in developing themes or ways of expressing sensitive themes in entertainment-education products. Failure to recognize these strategies can result in unfortunate consequences for local practitioners/producers.

The fifth guideline makes explicit the potential complications associated with the fourth. It states that "the implementation of an entertainment-education campaign necessitates the *concerted backing and resources of a well established and highly committed organization*. The technology transfer of the methodology requires a project champion to coordinate the appropriate broadcasting decision makers." Issues of status, power, and leverage are implicated

here. Failure to recognize this dynamic can result in undue influence on content. That situation can compromise the anticipated outcomes.

Nariman recognizes these implications and therefore offers as her sixth guideline the need for *the establishment of a communication process ... among contributors ... [and] various public and private organizations*. In that process she also recommends the development of a *central figure* with authority to make final decisions regarding content. Social change communicators need to recognize the importance of decision making authority but they should not lose sight of the impulse to dominate that central figures may have.

The guidelines most emblematic process statements reaffirm the *centrality of formative research and the use of theory in the conceptualization, design, distribution and evaluation of entertainment-education products*. Guideline # 7 reminds us that formative research should be an ongoing process that begins during the planning and continues throughout production and initial broadcast months. Further, guideline # 8 concludes that because of the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the process for developing an effective entertainment-education soap opera, the strategy provides a forum for field testing these theories and generating data for subsequent communication studies and data. Those conclusions profile a recurrent axiological issue: To what extent does research practice influence what is being studied? (or the halo effect). As Littlejohn has concluded, observation by its very nature distorts that which is being observed. Sometimes the distortion is great, sometimes small, but it is always there (Littlejohn, 1992: 34.) An additional and important teleological concern asks who will have access to the data generated?

Most of the remaining guidelines focus on achieving desired outcomes. These guidelines also elicit concerns about unintended consequences. Table 1 identifies those remaining guidelines and associated ethical concerns.

This examination has attempted to contribute to the development of a more explicitly stated ethical framework for use in conceptualization, design, distribution and evaluation of entertainment-education products. This framework is especially needed given the globalization of electronic communication and the potential aftermarket use of many so-called prosocial entertainment materials.

Press Ethics as a Source of Ethical Guidelines

Given the paucity of research on the ethics of social intervention, especially as it applies to entertainment-education, we can also attempt to borrow from the much more developed field of ethics as it applies to the press. The close professional relationship between the practice of journalism and edutainment justifies such an attempt.

Many of the ethical principles that influence the practice of contemporary journalism are derived from ideas developed during the Enlightenment, a fertile period in the evolution of human thought that realigned the basic assumptions about reality, truth and the relation of humans to the world. A study of the 1994 Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists reverberates with voices of the Enlightenment. The core ideas of contemporary press ethics are those of *individual autonomy, truth and objectivity*. These ideas work in conjunction

to shape the journalist as an "objective truth-seeker." They can be applied to entertainment-education practitioners too.

One of the key philosophical developments of the Enlightenment was the concept of the *autonomy of the individual*. This concept had a profound impact on political thinking and the ideas that shaped the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Drawing on the political theories of John Locke, Jefferson and the other framers of the American independence envisioned a political system in which individual rights were paramount. The individual consented to the establishment of the government and had the power to change that government should it not serve the public good. One of the keys to the successful implementation of this system was a free press. The press, unencumbered by prior restraint, would serve to inform the citizenry and act as a check against the power of the government. Jefferson wrote, "were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter" (Stempel, p.2). Initially, the press was a partisan press but this changed as printing methods evolved and the literacy rate increased. The concept of the autonomy of the individual has direct and obvious implications for entertainment education and, more generally, for social intervention.

A second major contribution of the Enlightenment was the concept of the *verifiable truth*. Empirical methods were developed to test physical laws. The physical sciences became the model for the practice of all types of inquiry. The belief in a verifiable reality has shaped our perceptions of the world in which we live. Even our legal system is based on the premise of "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." Increasingly, however, it is becoming apparent that truth, or reality, is a slippery construct. Yet, the job of the journalist is to find and report the truth. The Society of Professional Journalists, in their code of ethics, proclaims that "Truth is our ultimate goal" (The Quill, 1994). In practice, the truth is gained by interviewing sources and cross checking their accounts. Through the process of verifying the facts behind a story, the truth can be revealed. Again, it is important to point out that this method of truth finding is based upon the assumption that there is one truth, one reality.

The third principle of the Enlightenment that we will examine is *objectivity*. Objectivity comes out of the relationship between individual autonomy and truth. Going back to the earlier part of this discussion, each person is a reasoning individual and truth can be verified through reason and empirical methods. To get at this truth one must have objectivity, or the ability to examine a problem through pure reason, unclouded by bias. The journalists' code of ethics places their call for objectivity directly underneath their statement about the truth. How can a reporter be objective? Under section III of the Code of Ethics, journalists are given guidelines on how to conduct themselves. Item 2, for example, states that "Secondary employment, political involvement, holding public office, and service in community organizations should be avoided if it compromises the integrity of journalists and their employers" (The Quill, 1994). In the case of entertainment-education, the principle of objectivity is just as important but its practical application will probably have to follow different rules.

How do individual autonomy, truth, and objectivity work together in the real world? Phillip Meyer characterizes the moral profile of a journalist: "a lone hero wandering from market to market like the archetypal cowboy of the movies, settling score on behalf of the common man against the rich and powerful. The rootlessness of the journalist stems from the fact that he or she is not quite part of the community" (The Quill, 1994, p. 32). While this moral profile and rootlessness is not apparent every day, we can see it quite clearly under intense news situations. To examine this more closely we will look at two events, the Hantavirus Scare and the Bombing at Oklahoma City.

In May of 1993, a disease that doctors could not identify appeared in the area inhabited by the Navajo Nation, in the Four Corners section of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah. The first half dozen victims of the disease were Navajo but it quickly claimed people in

other ethnic/racial groups. The early coverage of the outbreak labeled the illness "Navajo Flu," "Navajo Epidemic" and "Navajo Disease." This characterization of the illness as a native problem caused economic and emotional problems for the Navajo. Tourism dropped as people feared that they might contract the disease on the reservations. The Navajos were shunned in public, including a bus load of children who were turned away from a school in California where they had gone to visit their pen pals. In addition, the reporters sent to cover the story did not understand the community and culture of the Navajo people. Journalists ran roughshod over the traditions of the community. People who had just lost a family member were hounded for interviews, even though tradition does not allow the person's name to be spoken for four days. Reporters wanted to see and report on traditional rituals and asked to photograph sacred objects used by healers. In the quest to find the truth and to present a compelling story, journalists "infringed on the privacy of families who had lost a loved one and violated many of [the Navajos] customs and taboos" (The Quill, 1993, p.24).

The bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City provides another example of the problems in reporting. Within minutes of the explosion, network news organizations had interrupted regular programming to bring live coverage of the events. While the initial conjecture on who was to blame for this terrible act centered on the anniversary of the Waco incident, within hours journalists were reporting that three Middle Eastern men were being sought for the crime. To enhance coverage, ABC showed file footage of the U.S. Embassy bombing in Beirut to suggest the connection between the two bombings. While Peter Jennings, the news anchorperson, was careful to point out that these images did not prove a connection, their juxtaposition did just that. "Seeing is believing" and seeing on television is just as good as being there. However, within a few days arrests were made and the suspects turned out to be white men involved in the Militia Movement. The result of the early coverage was that Islamic communities faced discrimination and fear. At Ohio University, Islamic women did not go out of the house alone for fear of being attacked. While in this instance nothing happened to the community, the Islamic Center had been vandalized during the Gulf War and the fear was well founded. Yet, the news media have not accepted responsibility for the fear they incited nor have they apologized to the communities affected.

In both of these cases, the journalists who covered the events did the job as they know best and with the aim of getting the truth and getting it first. Without any attachment to the community the reporter can not fully understand the repercussions of the decisions. A new code of ethics for the journalist must place him/her back into the community. A communitarian ethical code demands a more active and engaged press.

Unlike contemporary press practice, which reports on events only after they happen, and in a manner that is more analogous to the practice of entertainment-education, an active press would engage in seeking out problems and helping define solutions. Jay Rosen calls for the press to return to public work. "It means confronting problems, debating solutions, arriving at decisions that have broad support; it also means recognizing diversity, permitting conflict while retaining some sense of common fate" (The Quill, 1993 p.27). The role of the press, according to Rosen, is not only objective reporting. Rather, "the essential task of the press [is] to succeed at a critical act of persuasion in which a free society freely chooses the option of public work" (The Quill, p. 28). Lewis Wolfson believes that the only hope for the future of U.S. newspapers is if they take on a new role, revitalizing democracy. "Nothing would more enliven coverage than aggressively seeking solutions to government's and society's problems ... [and] communicating to Americans a sense of belief in themselves and of the building that is to be done" (The Quill, 1993, p.30). Again, the similarity between the concerns being proposed for the press and the ones that edutainment practitioners routinely face is noticeable.

An example of how an activist press actually works can be found in an experience of the *Columbus Ledger-Inquirer* in the western part of Georgia. The newspaper did a traditional

piece on the problems facing the community as it approaches the year 2000. The series of articles featured interviews with community leaders and residents, along with the results of a survey. Little reaction to the series was noted. It was then that the editor moved into an activist mode. He decided to sponsor a town meeting at the newspaper's expense. The town meeting generated other meetings and events. Employees of the newspaper joined community organizations and the executive editor joined the steering committee of the community task force. The newspaper served as a bulletin board of events for the task force (Christians et. al., 1993, p. 87-89). In essence, they violated several of the principles in the existing journalist's code of ethics, yet they were able to energize the community into taking on the job of public work.

But this one case does not explain how communitarian ethics would work in a breaking news situation like the Hantavirus and Oklahoma City stories. In order to fulfill their mission to keep the reader informed about important events, journalists must continue to follow these types of stories. What is important is how these stories are covered. Journalists must operate with a deep an abiding belief in justice and fairness. Keeping justice and fairness in mind, they must weigh their actions against them. Trampling over the ancient traditions of any culture is not fair, announcing half-truths about those responsible for despicable acts is not just.

The role of the journalist under a new communitarian press ethic changes. No longer is he or she the lone cowboy righting wrongs for the common person. Now the reporter is part of the community, seeking solutions together with the common person. Objectivity can no longer be the sole standard on which to base reporting. Objectivity separates the reporter from the community, creates the image of the expert who can solve problems for people. Under this ethical model, the reporter must report fairly but he or she must also get into to the community. Only those who live in a community can know what the problems are and working together solutions can be found.

We submit that principles of a "communitarian ethic" could also guide the practice of entertainment-education and, more generally, social intervention. But, as Brown and Singhal observed five years ago about the field of ethics and prosocial television in general, this continues to be a relatively neglected and undeveloped field of inquiry. We must change that.

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